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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000265

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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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SUBJECT: PAYA: CUBAN REGIME NERVOUS ABOUT POLITICAL
SITUATION

REF: HAVANA 248

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Classified By: COM Michael E. Parmly for Reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Cuban human rights leader Oswaldo Paya says that although the Cuban Government is projecting an air of confidence, thanks to Venezuelan largesse and expanding business with China, the regime is desperate about the domestic political situation and showing great insecurity. During a three-hour meeting with COM Parmly on March 15, Paya said the GOC's nervousness can be seen in its a zero-tolerance policy toward Paya's Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), as well as in "unmistakable messages" sent during a March 9 interrogation of MCL executive Ernesto "Freddy" Martini. Paya cast doubt on whether any member of the Human Rights Council will introduce a resolution on Cuba's political prisoners. He also addressed the GOC's crusade against satellite TV access, said the posture of some European countries is hurting the Cuban people, and explained how State Security expertly vilifies dissidents for eating a bit of cheese. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Cuban State Security detained Martini, the second most powerful MCL official outside of prison, after he dropped off his daughter at school on March 9. Martini was taken to a safe house and interrogated for eight hours. According to Paya, the officials threatened Martini and referred repeatedly to the MCL's circulation of a proposed HRC resolution titled, "The Need for the Cuban Government to Liberate the Peaceful Political Prisoners." (Note: The MCL drafted the resolution and sent it to members of the HRC. End Note.) Paya said the regime's message was that "if the MCL keeps pressing HRC members to introduce the resolution, the regime will pull the rug out from under us." Paya said that although the GOC benefits from massive Venezuelan subsidies, a "sleeping population" and booming business with China, the regime is "desperate" about the political situation and keenly aware that discontent among Cubans is growing. Meanwhile, he said, Cuban elites are dead-set on maintaining absolute control and safeguarding their economic interests. "There is money in Cuba, and they want to keep it all." He also called nepotism rife within the ruling class.

RESOLUTION BACKING SEEN AS UNLIKELY

13. (C) Paya was pessimistic over the likelihood that an HRC member nation would introduce a resolution on Cuban political prisoners. But he noted "huge moral pressure" to do so, and said there's an outside chance that some country will muster the courage. If not, he said, the MCL will complain that the HRC has not taken steps to defend human rights defenders in Cuba. He said the MCL's proposal was supported by a majority of the "Ladies in White," with a few conspicuous exceptions (including leading Ladies Laura Pollan and Miriam Leyva). He added that he wrote directly to German Chancellor Merkel regarding the resolution proposal, but he did not disclose whether she responded.

STATE SECURITY DISTORTIONS

14. (C) Paya, founder of the Varela referendum project, said State Security has a talent for distorting any fleeting comforts that a dissident manages to enjoy. His youngest son recently celebrated his birthday, Paya explained, and his wish was to visit a swimming pool. Paya took him to a hotel pool and paid the \$6 per person entry fee. The visit was noted by State Security, which mentioned it during Martini's interrogation, saying Paya was living high on the hog. Paya said the characterization was similar to that of dissidents who attend a diplomatic reception and consume a bit of cheese, olives and beer. "The fact that Cubans are ordinarily denied these things is blamed on the dissidents, rather than the regime."

SATELLITE TV CRACKDOWN

15. (C) Paya said the GOC's aggressive effort to identify and confiscate satellite TV antennas shows that the regime is "terrified that people will see some alternative" to the

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current system. (Another dissident, in the Freemason movement, told P/E Counselor on March 15 that Cubans today are quick to replace and rebuild the TV antennas, which "grow back like weeds.") Paya said the number of true believers in communism/Castroism is no higher than five percent of the workforce, adding that young Cubans are particularly disenfranchised and apolitical, and largely hopeless.

EUROPEANS "POSITIONING THEMSELVES"

16. (C) Paya emphasized that some European nations, and at least one Asian nation, are more interested in positioning themselves for life in a future, free Cuba, than undertaking the crucial and arduous work of pushing for freedom. "They are doing so at the expense of the Cuban people," Paya said. Regarding the policies of a future, post-Fidel government, he said the MCL will not accept any "concessions," such as economic openings that are not accompanied by political reforms. "We want our rights. We want to be able to move freely and express ourselves freely."

COMMENT

17. (C) We share Paya's assessment that the regime is growing increasingly nervous, despite bravado to the contrary. It is unsurprising, therefore, that eight dissidents were detained on March 15, two of them shortly after visiting a USINT internet center. The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation informed us on March 16 that the number of "street (human rights) violations" it documented in February was up 36 percent from January.

PARMLY